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Nation

The Bloody Fall of a Hustler

Sniper strikes down porn's Larry Flynt

Larry Flynt, the owner of *Hustler* magazine, was the last defense witness at yet another of his trials for distributing pornography. "*Hustler* is a satire," he explained on the witness stand last week. "It is one big put-on."

"You did superbly," one of his lawyers told him when the state court in the Atlanta suburb of Lawrenceville (pop. 5,200) adjourned for lunch.

The 35-year-old publisher then joined another of his lawyers, Gene Reeves Jr., 47, in walking three blocks down Perry Street to the V and J Cafeteria. They were strolling back to the courthouse at 11:55 a.m. when there were two bursts of gunfire. Flynt toppled forward, face first, onto a concrete driveway, bullet holes in his abdomen. Reeves, struck in his arm and chest, staggered a few feet and collapsed on the sidewalk (he was later reported to be in satisfactory condition).

Despite early reports of two attackers speeding away in a car, nobody actually saw any gunmen. In fact, the only clue the police discovered was a spent .44 magnum cartridge. Investigators thought the shots might have been fired from an abandoned hotel across the street. A rear door of the hotel gives access to a parking lot, an easy escape route for a gunman.

At Button Gwinnett Hospital, Flynt lay in critical condition. Surgeons began by removing much of his intestine. Then, in a second operation, they removed his spleen. After transferring him to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, doctors finally removed the bullet lodged near his

spinal cord. It had cut spinal nerves, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. Doctors gave him less than a fifty-fifty chance of regaining full use of his legs. President Carter's sister, Ruth Stapleton, who had presided over Flynt's celebrated conversion last fall, flew in to Atlanta and called him "one of my good Christian friends." Sometime Comedian Dick Gregory visited, and so did Kennedy Assassination Theorist Mark Lane. Fellow Pornographer Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine, arrived in a chauffeured black limousine and a bullet-proof vest. Said he: "Maybe it was somebody down here who thought Larry was making fun of them."

The police had no explanations. Flynt occasionally received death threats—most recently at a rally in Cincinnati last year to protest his pornography conviction there. But he had lately been so confident of his safety that he was traveling without a bodyguard, though he had been advertising for one in newspapers. Local opinion was that although Flynt had no personal enemies, many people hated him for his opinions and his rambunctious life. Said Lawrenceville Mayor Rhodes Jordan, 60: "Somebody was sending Flynt a message, that they don't want his type of filth around."

Ever since Flynt came out of the Kentucky mountains to escape the pov-

erty of his sharecropper family, he has led an aggressive life. He quit school in the eighth grade, entered the Army at 14, worked nights at a General Motors assembly plant, whizzed through two marriages, two divorces and a bankruptcy by age 21 and finally opened eight "Hustler" go-go bars around Ohio. He started *Hustler*, the most vulgar of the leading sex magazines, as a newsletter for his bars, and pushed it in four years to a circulation of almost 2 million, with a profit last year of some \$13 million. In recent months he branched out into newspaper publishing, buying the Los Angeles *Free Press*, the Atlanta *Gazette* and the Plains *Monitor* in Carter's home town.

Among his hobbies, Flynt acquired a fascination for the Kennedy killing. He bought full-page newspaper ads offering \$1 million for information leading to the arrest of Kenne-

dy's murderer. In the underground Los Angeles *Free Press*, he published a report last month charging that a CIA-FBI conspiracy was behind the assassination. After last week's attempt on his life, Flynt's wife Althea, 24, publicly accused the CIA of shooting Flynt because he was about to publish the names of J.F.K.'s assassins in a *Free Press* special edition. From his hospital bed, Flynt himself made the absurd charge that the shooting was an attempt to stop his assassination inquiry.

At week's end, police had no solution. Meanwhile, the judge declared a mistrial on the original obscenity charges, and authorities were considering dropping them altogether. ■

